



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Both names are so common that no conclusion can be drawn from any combination of them, unless it is accompanied by a more definite description. Dr. Poznański lays great stress on Ibn Aknīn's title ראש הסדר, but he mentions *Judah b. Joseph of Kairowān* who had the same title, and calls attention to several other persons so distinguished. Thus this argument also fails to convince.

I am under the impression that this Judah b. Joseph of Kairowān furnishes the key to the problem, and that the Joseph of the fragment was either his father or his son, both bearing the title ראש הסדר. We can, then, dispense with any argument *pro* and *contra*, derived from the quotation from Aaron b. Sargadū. Knowledge of astronomy does not prove anything in this matter, as it figured in the syllabus of study of nearly every person of higher education.

I take this opportunity of adding one word to Prof. Steinschneider's last article on *Die Jüdische Literatur des Mittelalters* (p. 160). The oldest polemical work against Christianity is David b. Al Moqammas' Arabic treatise, "Fifty queries in Refutation of Christianity," a fragment of which was published (as no. V) in this Journal, July, 1903.

H. HIRSCHFELD.

## CRITICAL NOTICE.

### PROF. J. FREUDENTHAL'S "LIFE OF SPINOZA."

*Spinoza, sein Leben und seine Lehre*, von J. FREUDENTHAL, Professor der Philosophie an der Universität Breslau. Erster Band: *Das Leben Spinozas*. (Stuttgart, Fr. Frommann's Verlag, 1904, pp. xiv, 349.)

THE volume before us is the first instalment of a larger work, the second part of which is to treat of Spinoza's philosophy. The first volume, however, is complete in itself. It treats of the life and times of the famous Jewish philosopher, and of his thought just as much and as popularly as is necessary for the due appreciation of his life and character.

"It is not often that any man in this world lives a life so well worth writing as Spinoza lived; not for striking incidents or large events connected with it, but because . . . he was one of the very

best men whom these modern times have seen." This utterance of Froude<sup>1</sup> indicates at once the delight and the difficulty that fall to the share of the would-be biographer of Spinoza. The whole range of biography contains but few subjects likely to sustain so well, and to repay so richly in inspiration, the historian's long labours of love. On the other hand, Spinoza's was an uneventful life, its scanty incidents are but poorly recorded, and there are many gaps. "Of Spinoza's private life," says Froude<sup>1</sup>, "rich as it must have been, and abundant traces as must be extant somewhere in his own and his friends' correspondence, we know only enough to feel how vast a chasm remains to be filled." During the last decade or so, special efforts have been made to discover more biographical matter, and all likely places have been ransacked for the purpose. The results obtained have not quite realized the fond hopes of the great philosopher's innumerable admirers, partly, no doubt, because many of Spinoza's letters have been wilfully destroyed by timid correspondents who were afraid to leave behind them evidence of their contact with a notorious heretic. Still the results are of considerable importance none the less, as may be seen from Meinsma's *Spinoza en zijn kring* (1896), and Professor Freudenthal's *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas in Quellschriften, Urkunden und nichtamtlichen Nachrichten*<sup>2</sup> (1899), which, in Heinze's latest edition of Ueberweg's *Geschichte der Philosophie*<sup>3</sup>, has been deservedly described as "viel unbekanntes Material bringend, so höchst fördernd; eine sichere Grundlage für die bis jetzt noch immer in vielen Punkten nicht feststehende Lebensgeschichte Spinozas." A new *Life* of Spinoza, based on the latest evidence, has become a great desideratum. And it was but fitting that Professor Freudenthal should be the author of that new biography.

No living writer is better qualified to write on Spinoza than is Professor Freudenthal. As long ago as 1887 he made an important contribution to the study of Spinozism by his *Spinoza und die Scholastik*<sup>4</sup> (in a volume of philosophical essays published in celebration of the Jubilee of Zeller's Doctorate), and since then Spinozism seems to have been the distinguished Professor's favourite theme. The pages of this REVIEW have shown some evidence of that in the interesting essay on the "History of Spinozism"<sup>5</sup>. But length of

<sup>1</sup> *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, vol. I, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> Reviewed in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. XI, p. 490 f.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. III, p. 113 (ninth edition).

<sup>4</sup> This important essay seems to have been inadvertently omitted from the list of Professor Freudenthal's writings enumerated in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. V, p. 509.

<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. VIII, pp. 17 ff.

devotion and philosophical acumen are not Professor Freudenthal's only qualifications for his arduous undertaking. Like Spinoza himself (as the late Professor Lazarus fondly insisted<sup>1</sup>), his present biographer is a past *Talmudjünger* as well as a philosopher. And for the due appreciation of the many-sided Spinoza, such versatility is as indispensable as it is rare. The result is accordingly most gratifying. To say that Professor Freudenthal's book is the best biography of Spinoza that has yet been written, would convey no adequate idea of its excellence; it is the only one that may be recommended without reservation, and is likely to remain the standard authority for many years to come. The learned author is to be warmly congratulated on his eminently successful achievement.

That it is always helpful, and almost always necessary, to know something of the life-history and character of a thinker in order to properly estimate his thought, is a truth which is wellnigh become a platitude nowadays. But it was not always so. Spinoza was one of the first to advocate it, in a passage which Professor Freudenthal very appropriately uses as the motto of his book. The truth applies to Spinozism in no small measure. And Professor Freudenthal's book illustrates it admirably by the light which it throws on a number of points relating to the evolution of Spinoza's philosophy.

One of the oldest and most interesting problems connected with Spinozism relates to the external influences that have contributed to the shaping of it. "The whole history of past philosophy," the late Professor Adamson remarked<sup>2</sup>, "has been ransacked in order to trace the sources of Spinoza's system." Justinian and Grotius, Macchiavelli and Hobbes, Augustine and Aquinas, Crescas and Maimonides, Descartes and Bruno, Neoplatonism and Cabbala—the influences of all these, and more, have been detected in the writings of Spinoza, and their relative claims have been variously estimated by different authorities. In this conflict of opinions, what is of special Jewish interest is the fluctuation in the estimate of the Jewish factor among the manifold influences at work in moulding the genius of Spinoza. How widely critics have been divided in their views on this question may be seen by comparing the view of Joel with that of the late Professor Adamson. To Joel the Jewish factor appeared to be of paramount importance. Nor was Joel's view unique, or shared by Jews only. The late Professor Croom Robertson maintained that "Spinoza, while following Descartes, had, besides, distinctly independent views; the most characteristic aspect of him came from the

<sup>1</sup> *Die Ethik des Judenthums*, p. 438 f.

<sup>2</sup> *The Development of Modern Philosophy*, vol. I, p. 58.

Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages<sup>1</sup>." On the other hand, Croom Robertson's great friend, the late Professor Adamson, one of the acutest and best read of recent philosophical critics, has estimated the amount of agreement between Spinoza and the Jewish mediaeval philosophers as "no more than is inevitable among comprehensive attempts at a philosophical explanation of things," and thought that "it would not be difficult to discover in him far greater resemblance to the classical thinkers than to Jewish writers<sup>2</sup>." Now it would be idle to disclaim altogether a Jewish partiality in favour of a high estimate of the Jewish factor in Spinozism. Froude may be right when he postpones the possibility of writing faithful and literal history till the millennium, when perfect knowledge and perfect faith in God shall enable man to see and endure every fact in its reality, and perfect love shall kindle in him the one just emotion which is in harmony with the eternal order of things. Even Spinoza, with his deep knowledge, his intellectual love of God, and his abiding faith in the eternal order of things, fell short of Froude's ideal historian; when treating of his own people he at times betrays his righteous indignation because of their scandalous treatment of him. Still, however much one may allow for the personal equation and individual bias, there still remains ample justification for resenting Professor Adamson's slight estimate of the Jewish contribution towards Spinozism. In dealing with Spinoza, critics, Jewish as well as Christian, are at times given to exaggerate the importance of the smallest parallelisms of expression and thought. In the philosophic system of any philosopher, but especially in so comprehensive a philosophy as that of Spinoza, there are bound to be traces of many outside influences. So vast a structure must needs contain stones from many quarries; but the facts of supreme interest are the architectonic genius of the master-builder, and the total impression which his work conveys. Genius is as such necessarily unaccountable. But in striving to estimate the several influences exercised upon it, the total impression of a man's work is worth far more than a great mass of details. And there can be but little doubt as to the total impression which Spinoza's writings leave, the fine moral spirit which they breathe. Many streams meet in the Spinozistic deep, and diverse currents seem at times to agitate it, but it is the Hebraic spirit that moves upon the face of its waters. Spinoza was no moralist in the ordinary sense of the term, but contact with him affects one in a manner resembling nothing so closely as the inspira-

<sup>1</sup> *Elements of General Philosophy*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

tion one carries away from the great Hebrew prophets. Such is the total impression which Spinoza leaves on his readers. That this is what Christians as well as Jews feel, may be seen from the following remarks of Mr. Duff, one of the most recent exponents of Spinozism. "I shall have but ill repaid the dues of my nurture," so writes Mr. Duff<sup>1</sup>, "if I do not succeed in setting before the reader, in some measure, the ripe wisdom, the large outlook upon life, the resolute faith in goodness, the clear Jewish vision into the recesses of the human heart, which have been to myself the constraining and the sustaining force in this long labour of love."

One naturally turns to Professor Freudenthal for more light on the question just touched on, and one is not disappointed. Not that Professor Freudenthal has, in the present volume, formally put and discussed the question, but he has anticipated, and in a manner answered it in such a way that the reader never thinks of putting it. The account which he has given of Spinoza's life and character does full justice to the Jewish factor in the evolution of Spinoza. Nowhere else does one find such clear, full, and sympathetic treatment of the total Jewish atmosphere in which Spinoza grew up, and of the Hebraic spirit which suffused his being, while at the same time ample justice is done to all other factors in his philosophical progress. Nowhere else can one find such a full and well-balanced account of all the influences at work in the growth of Spinoza's mind.

It is not only on questions of such general import that Professor Freudenthal succeeds in throwing fresh light. There are also less general problems which become far less perplexing under our author's treatment. One such point we may select for special consideration as an excellent illustration of how our author indirectly disposes of a number of difficulties and misconceptions.

It has been long known that Spinoza had very nearly completed his *Ethica* before taking up the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. And yet the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* was published in 1671, whereas the *Ethica* was not published till after his death. This interruption in the working out of his *Ethica*, and his subsequent reluctance to publish it even after it had been finished, compared with the comparatively quick dispatch of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, have attracted considerable attention, and led to some strange speculations, as the following passage from Martineau will show. "It is natural to ask," writes Martineau<sup>2</sup>, "how it was that Spinoza after finishing his *Ethica* left it to sleep the years away in manuscript, and turning

<sup>1</sup> *Spinoza's Political and Ethical Philosophy*, p. x.

<sup>2</sup> *A Study of Spinoza*, p. 57 f.

his back upon it threw himself immediately into another work, which he gave to the world as soon as he could complete it. . . . It may be taken for certain that he intended immediate publication, subject only to the condition . . . that by preserving the anonymous he could avoid the risk of odium and persecution. As he approached the closing section he would become anxious to determine this remaining doubt, and a motive is thus supplied for his April visit to Amsterdam. There he would be able to consult all the friends who had read the manuscript; there he could confide his purpose to the publishers most likely to give it success; there he would ascertain whether his papers had passed too freely from hand to hand for the authorship to remain secret. The result, we may well believe, awakened his fears and sent him back with a resolve to open his assault upon public errors from another side, and by a work which, never leaving his own desk during its progress, should be brought home to him by neither indiscretion nor treachery." The most plausible explanation of the matter seemed to be that the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* was intended to demolish current views in order to clear the ground, as it were, and make room for the positive construction of his novel philosophy. Even so, however, difficulties still remained. Why did Spinoza put forward the vindication of freedom to philosophize as the primary object of the treatise? Why is the book so harsh in places, and its tone at times very unlike the philosophic calm so characteristic of the *Ethica*? Compared with the *Ethica* the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* has something of the combativeness of political conflict about it.

Professor Freudenthal's view shows us the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in its true character, and in the light of that view all the supposed difficulties vanish. The *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Professor Freudenthal holds, must not be regarded simply as an academic treatise, but as an urgent contribution to the practical politics of the time. It was written in vindication of the liberal policy of his friend and patron, Jan de Witt, against the intolerant divines of the dominant church, who were always urging hard, and sometimes successfully, for measures of oppression against all dissenters. In this book we see Spinoza taking an active and prominent part in the conflict between Church and State which was then agitating the Netherlands. Unhesitatingly he sides with the liberal-minded State-pensionary, and joins issue with the bigoted theologians, fighting them on their own ground by showing up their ignorance of the very scriptures on which they sought to base their authority and their claims to a salvation monopoly. This view of the matter seems fully justified by a very lucid and interesting account of affairs in Holland at the time, and puts a new complexion on the

book. It seems reasonable enough and probable enough that Spinoza should have put aside a speculative treatise like his *Ethica* in order to deal with a more practical and more urgent problem of the day. Many things in the book will also appear less harsh and more intelligible if it is remembered that Spinoza is leading a crusade against narrow-minded and presumptuous theologians.

Professor Freudenthal's view of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* at the same time shows the injustice of the insinuations of excessive timidity and political nonchalance that have been made against the character of Spinoza. Martineau, speaking of the correspondence between Oldenburg and Spinoza, remarks: "When we remember what was passing in the streets of London and on the Northern Sea during the summer and autumn of 1665, it is strange to see how slight a vestige it has left on the correspondence of its witnesses and participators. . . . Slight as were Oldenburg's allusions to the international crisis of the autumn of 1665, they were in the form of direct questions, apparently quite artless. Yet Spinoza's answer passes them by in silence, content to speculate on the psychology of an intelligent worm hypothetically imprisoned in the human blood. Whether his suppressed letters, if we had them, would remove the impression of political nonchalance . . . can never be known<sup>1</sup>." Sir Frederick Pollock has expressed it as his opinion that "on the practical points of legislation and administration Spinoza was far more enlightened than the accepted authorities of his time<sup>2</sup>." That such political sagacity should go hand in hand with political nonchalance would be strange indeed. But the whole thing assumes a totally different complexion if we recognize in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* the expression of his warm interest and active participation in the current politics of the day.

We shall be looking forward with great eagerness and pleasure to the appearance of Professor Freudenthal's next volume, which is to treat of the philosophy of Spinoza.

A. WOLF.

<sup>1</sup> *A Study of Spinoza*, pp. 67, 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Mind*, 1903 (p. 402).